

Native American Languages Resource Center Act

Congresswoman Deb Haaland (NM-01)

The Problem.

Due to the Federal Government's failure to keep its promises to Tribal Nations, indigenous languages are on the brink of extinction. Native American language learning and teaching lack resources and Native American language schools and programs desperately need coordinated, experienced support in best practices, including how to use technology to instruct, develop teaching materials, and certify Native American language teachers. Without action, years of progress in preserving and revitalizing Native American languages will be lost.

The Solution.

The *Native American Languages Resource Center Act* would create a designated resource center to preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and revive Native American languages through necessary technology and training centered on distance learning, digital libraries and other online resources, support in the development of distance learning curricula, and pedagogical training for teachers.

Background.

An estimated 500 distinct Native American languages were spoken in North America; yet due to the implementation of the federally funded "Indian Boarding School Policy", only 150 languages are still spoken in the United States. In 1990, the Congress passed the landmark Native American Languages Act (NALA) to reverse the previous policy of eliminating indigenous languages. The NALA committed the United States to work with Native Americans to use, practice and develop their traditional languages, for both the preservation and revitalization of Native American languages. Despite 30 years of NALA, there is no center for Native American languages to support this work.

The Native American Languages Resource Center Act would:

- Establish, strengthen, and operate a Native American Languages Resource Center consisting of an institution or a consortium of institutions and other entities with unique responsibilities for Native American Languages and staff that center with individuals with high-level fluency and experience in Native American language education at all levels;
- Allow the United States to fulfill its trust responsibility to Native American communities and address the effects of the past discrimination against Native American language speakers;
- Improve the capacity to teach and learn Native American languages and further Native American language acquisition;
- Encourage and support revitalization of Native American languages as a medium of instruction for Pre-K to PhD levels of education to include Native American languages in the curriculum in the same manner as other world languages, including through cooperative agreements and distance education, and to grant proficiency in Native American languages the same full academic credit as proficiency in other world languages;
- Encourage and support the development of appropriate teacher preparation programming for the teaching of, and through, Native American languages, including appropriate alternative pathways to teacher certification;
- Provide a resource base to provide information to Federal, Tribal, State, and local governments and Native American educational organizations to allow the spread of best practices in the use, practice, and development of Native American communities, including use in educational institutions;
- Provide a resource base for the use of technology in intensive community-, land-, and archive-based programs, as well as hybrid and collaborative programs in supporting the retention, use, development, and teaching of Native American languages by government and private entities;
- Provide a means to further collaboration among formal government, institutional, and community-based Native American language programs, resources, and research efforts with additional access to international best practices in indigenous language revitalization.